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What to Expect During an On-Farm Readiness Review

The Food Safety Modernization Act or FSMA, signed into law in 2011, establishes a “farm to fork” approach to food safety with a focus on prevention. The Produce Safety Rule (PSR), one of the rules associated with FSMA, establishes science based, minimum standards for the growing, harvesting, packing and holding of fruits and vegetables. Farms that produce fresh fruits and vegetables commonly consumed raw may be subject to the PSR- there are exemptions to the rule.

What is an On-Farm Readiness Review?

An On-Farm Readiness Review (OFRR) is a voluntary and non-regulatory review of a farm’s readiness for compliance with the PSR. OFRRs will provide farmers with information and resources to assist in meeting the requirements of the PSR and prepare for inspections. During an OFRR, a farmer has access to produce safety experts that will evaluate on-farm practices and conditions to provide feedback on what is going well and identify opportunities for improvement in food safety practices. The reviewers will provide resources to enhance produce safety practices and will suggest produce safety improvements specific to the farm.

How is an On-Farm Readiness Review different from an audit or inspection?

An On-Farm Readiness Review is not a regulatory visit, inspection or an audit. The produce safety experts on the review team will work with the farmer to provide technical assistance to assist in PSR implementation efforts. The review team will provide the farmer with a resource tool that can be used as a reference after the OFRR is completed. All notes taken by the reviewers will be left with the farm at the end of the visit.

Who conducts On-Farm Readiness Reviews?

On-Farm Readiness Reviews will be conducted jointly by NCDA&CS Produce Safety Program and Produce Safety Area Specialized Agents from North Carolina State University Extension.

How does a farm prepare for an On-Farm Readiness Review?

We strongly recommend that at least one person from the farm complete the Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower Training Course before scheduling an OFRR. The PSA Grower Training will provide you with essential background knowledge about the FSMA Produce Safety Rule and recommended produce safety practices that will help you to get the most out of the OFRR.

It is very important that the reviewers observe routine farm operations (such as harvesting, washing, packing, cooling and holding) during the OFRR so reviewers can make accurate

recommendations for produce safety improvements specific to your farm. The OFRR should be scheduled when the farm is in production and conducting activities covered under the PSR.

What happens during an On-Farm Readiness Review?

1. Reviewers will begin by asking a series of questions to better understand the farm operation including what commodities are grown, produce safety practices, farm procedures. The reviewer will also assist the farmer determining if their operation is exempt from the PSR.
2. Reviewers will ask to view different areas of the farm to review harvesting, washing, and packing processes as well as storage or holding areas.
3. At the end of the visit, reviewers will provide feedback on farm operations and identify priority areas for improvement in produce safety practices on your farm.
4. NCSU can provide additional technical assistance based on the feedback from your On-Farm Readiness Review, which may involve or additional farm visits or sharing resources.

What if a public health hazard is found during an On-Farm Readiness Review?

In the rare instance that we observe a serious condition that could be considered “egregious” (one that could create an imminent public health hazard if a corrective action is not taken immediately), the regulators on the OFRR team will assess the situation to determine if any additional action is necessary in order to protect public health. The farmer will be engaged throughout this process and it is the intention of the program to immediately address any serious concerns on-site during the OFRR.

If my farm is not covered under the FSMA Produce Safety Rule, can I still request an On-Farm Readiness Review?

Yes. Any farm that grows and/or sells produce covered under the PSR is eligible to request an On-Farm Readiness Review.

How do I sign-up for an On-Farm Readiness Review?

Contact the NCDA&CS Produce Safety Program to request an OFRR and learn more about the process. The program can be reached by telephone at 919 614 3082 or email at: chris.harris@ncagr.gov.

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